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NUTRITION COMMITTEE NEWS

For exchange of
information on
nutrition education and
school lunch activities

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EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCES INCLUDE NUTRITION EDUCATION

MARY M. HILL, Ed. D., NUTRITIONIST, INSTITUTE OF HOME ECONOMICS

In recent months two conferences of key groups have included sessions which may indicate (1) the direction nutrition education is taking and (2) the professional education workers will be needing to conduct programs in the years ahead.

The American Association of School Administrators of the Northeast Region met in March and the North Atlantic Regional Conference on College Teaching of Foods and Nutrition was held in April.

Whatever future action participants in these conferences take in their respective work situations may have implications for nutrition committees as well as for nutritionists and related health workers. Therefore, in this issue of NCN, we include the highlights of this aspect of these two conferences.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONFER

The Pennsylvania School Food Service Association was invited to present the educational aspects of school feeding at a special interest session of the Northeast Regional Conference of American Association of School Administrators.

The invitation was welcomed because school feeding is often considered solely as a service provided—one fraught with administrative problems—rather than as a part of the total educational program.

Planning the Program

"Putting the Plus in School Food Service" was the title chosen for the presentation. The State supervisor of School Lunch and Nutrition in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction was asked to describe activities which demonstrate the educational dimension of school lunch in Pennsylvania schools.

The superintendent of Cheltenham Township, Pa., schools and the assistant superintendent for business affairs of the Great Neck, N. Y., schools were invited to participate. These administrators had encouraged the development of the educational aspects of the feeding program in

their schools and thus could describe the advantages which accrue from a well-conducted lunch operation.

The planning committee considered the attitude of the customers important to a successful school lunch. Therefore, a boy and a girl from William Allen High School in Allentown, Pa., along with their school lunch manager, were invited to report on student involvement in the school lunch program.

A nutrition educator, familiar with school lunch activities in many school situations, was also asked to participate.

Dr. John Perryman, executive director of the American School Food Service Association, agreed to preside.

Highlights of the Program

The educational obligation defined.—The nutrition educator defined the obligation of the school as follows: Our educational objective is to help each child become as creative and productive as his capacities will allow.

We have valid evidence to indicate that poor nutrition can be an obstacle to learning. Since the school's function is to help children learn, any obstacle that prevents or diminishes the possibilities for learning presents a problem to the school.

It must be the concern of the school to cooperate with the home and community agencies to help youngsters (1) develop wholesome attitudes toward food, (2) establish and make permanent good eating habits, and (3) understand the importance of maintaining these habits for themselves and any children they may have in the future.

School lunch can contribute.—Educational research indicates a good procedure is to develop programs centered in the school—the classroom and the school lunch—that project into the home and the community.

The school lunch can translate learnings into meals that look good, taste good, and that young people will eat. It also provides the repeated experience with desirable practices that is so important to habit formation.

Good communication with parents is essential. Classroom learning and experience with good food selection in

school can influence the meals eaten at home if parents understand the school program and cooperate by setting a good example at home.

The school lunch further provides a controlled situation where changes in attitudes and habits can be observed and measured.

Cooperative activities also contribute.—School lunch managers throughout Pennsylvania who were cooperating with teachers and health workers in conducting educational programs had colored slides made of activities in the school lunch which contributed to the total educational program. These slides, sent in from schools in many localities were shown by the State Supervisor of School Lunch and Nutrition to illustrate the possibilities for teaching nutrition and for enriching teaching in other areas of learning.

For example, one slide showed primary grade children being served an attractive type-A lunch while a second slide showed secondary school students making choices within the type-A pattern. Another was a picture of junior high school students learning the principles of science by studying the compressor in the school lunch milk cooler. Still another showed parents and a school lunch manager discussing a type-A lunch prepared to illustrate how the lunch supplies one-third of the recommended daily allowance of nutrients for children.

Students report.—Two high school seniors told how they, along with fellow students, learned what their school lunch program offered and how they helped plan and make the school lunch one which students would patronize.

The school lunch manager had appealed to the officers of such student organizations as the honor society, the student council, and other significant groups for student leadership in improving the school lunch as well as student participation in the lunch program.

These students were shown how, in many instances, they were actually paying less than cost for the adequate meal served to them. They also learned that a large percentage of students were not taking advantage of the lunch program and of those who did participate, many were purchasing only a la carte dessert items in preference to a complete lunch.

Students, teachers, and the school lunch manager discussed the problem and concluded that all students needed to know what a good buy they could get. However, it was agreed that the lunchroom could be more cheerful looking and that menus could be more flexible to offer students some choice. This was especially important to girls who wished to control their weight.

A "school lunch week" was planned. Students, under the direction of the art department, made bright and interesting posters for the school lunchroom. Mathematics classes

calculated costs of lunch menus and displayed these costs on charts indicating the advantage to the student of the surplus and donated commodities. Home economics classes, in consultation with the school lunch manager, planned menus that were used. The manager devised a plan to offer some choice within the type-A menus.

The two students reported that the complete lunch sales and the total sales had increased while the a la carte sales had decreased. They also stated that student attitude toward the lunch was greatly improved and predicted greater participation as students learned they could select lunches on several different calorie levels each day.

Administrators react.—The two administrators commented on nutrition education in the curriculum. The meeting was then thrown open to discussion. Administrators' observations could be summed up as follows:

1. Curriculum probably should encompass all experiences, including eating, provided for children from the time they leave home until they return home at the end of the schoolday.
2. The school lunch can make a valuable contribution to nutrition education and to the total educational program—most areas of learning can be enriched by well-planned school lunch activities.
3. For nutrition education to be most effective, organized efforts must be made to inform parents and to secure their understanding cooperation—adults and children must learn concurrently. School lunch activities involving parents provide one channel of communication with parents.
4. Many administrators are fully aware of the school's obligation and are interested in doing something constructive about it. They want to know how this can best be accomplished (along with other important obligations) and where to get the necessary consultant help when it is needed.

COLLEGE TEACHERS MEET

Teachers are going to be called on more and more to contribute to this rapidly growing area of education. Therefore, the program of the North Atlantic Regional Conference on College Teaching of Foods and Nutrition included the topic "Our Role in Nutrition Education."

The speaker presented information about nutrition education as it is now being carried on and discussed what participants of current programs feel are the factors which limit effectiveness. She also discussed problems related to professional education which might prove helpful to college teachers in deciding how best to prepare nutrition workers to meet the challenges of the years ahead.

Nutrition Education in the U. S.

Nutrition education is the transmission of knowledge, attitudes, and habits which promote health, insofar as the food we eat is concerned.

How it is being carried on.—Nutrition education is being provided by several groups and in a variety of ways. Each approach has great strength and obvious limitations.

1. In the home—by parents and other family members.
 - *Strength.* Learning begins with living. If wholesome attitudes and good habits are established early in life, it is easier to maintain them than to substitute good for poor practices later.
 - *Limitation.* Family members, although sincere, may or may not have sound information, wholesome attitudes, or desirable food habits themselves.
2. In schools—by teachers (elementary, home economics, science), school lunch staff, health workers—including nurses, doctors, dentists, and others.
 - *Strength.* We have a captive audience on a day-by-day basis at a time in children's lives when habits are relatively easy to modify if changes are needed.
 - *Limitation.* We find a limited background in nutrition among teachers, limited facility in working with very young children on the part of secondary school teachers, and a limited background in foods and food values among health workers.
3. In the community—by nutrition specialists, home economists, and related health workers.
 - *Strength.* Programs are directed and conducted by persons with background in nutrition.
 - *Limitation.* People have had to learn to use the services offered. These programs still do not reach all the people who could benefit but the number seeking help is steadily increasing.
4. In institutions such as hospitals—by dietitians, nurses, and other related workers.
 - *Strength.* It is possible to reach people at a time when they are concerned enough about their health to be motivated to make behavioral changes in eating habits if they are needed.
 - *Limitation.* We find limited facility among the staff in working with people of all ages.
5. Through the mass media of communication—by nutritionists, home economists, faddists, and advertising specialists.
 - *Strength.* These programs reach virtually everyone and often with techniques that influence behavior.
 - *Limitation.* Nutrition facts are often used out of context in promotion of products and in a manner that promotes misleading information.

What Are the Basic Problems?

Sources of sound information—nutritional and educational—where and when they are needed. Interpretation of basic information and of new knowledge as it is established must also be provided in terms of what it means to various family members in their everyday lives.

One thing seems certain—regardless of which of the foods and nutrition professions a student plans to enter, she needs to develop facility in working with all age groups if she is to serve as a source of sound information to school and community groups.

Coordination of activities is needed to be sure that the nutrition information presented to different age groups and coming from many sources will be consistent. This is important not only in promoting modifications in food practices where they are needed but in helping people understand the reasons for nutritional recommendations.

A team approach to comprehensive nutrition education is likely to be most effective. Therefore, prospective nutrition workers need to learn to work as team members.

Communication—Effective two-way systems of communication among all groups concerned with nutrition education are needed to provide opportunities for mutual understanding of objectives, procedures, and problems. Many communities with their health and nutrition committees have moved toward setting up and maintaining such communication. Thus a knowledge of the techniques of intra- and inter-group communication will be useful to nutrition workers.

Where Are We? What Are Our Goals?

There is no doubt that knowledge, attitudes, and habits (good or poor) are being taught to all age groups. Studies of food consumption and food habits indicate that much progress has been made since 1920 but far too many children and adults still are not eating adequate diets.

Consider, however, what we have accomplished. What do all these working groups represent? *Together* they provide a structure already in operation that has a fine potential for reaching all the people. We need only learn to use this structure to best advantage.

All groups, including those using the mass media of communication, could conduct broad positive programs that promote wholesome attitudes and good eating habits and that emphasize the exciting and interesting story of how our bodies use the good selection of food we eat to meet our varied needs.

In addition, nutrition specialists in public health agencies—both governmental and voluntary—and in hospitals working with the appropriate medical specialists could help those with specific pathological conditions make, maintain, and understand the necessary diet modifications.

Implications for College Teachers

Interest of administrators in elementary and secondary schools.—School administrators, as reported on page 1, for the first time this year had a session of their regional conference devoted to school lunch programs. They indicated that hesitancy in initiating programs is not due to lack of interest or conviction concerning importance of the work but is due to paucity of consultant help *whenever* it is needed to compensate for limitations in nutrition background among teachers.

Increasing volume of pleas for suitable educational materials for all kinds of nutrition programs.—Workers in the many agencies concerned with nutrition as well as professors of nutrition in colleges and universities report innumerable requests for suitable materials, and a constant demand for up-to-date bibliographies.

Steadily increasing number of requests for consultant help that are received by nutritionists everywhere.—Most nutrition teachers in colleges and specialists in community agencies could be serving in a consultant capacity for school and community programs to an extent that would interfere with the completion of their major responsibilities. Many nutritionists report they are constantly having to refuse or to make compromise suggestions to groups seeking help.

Continual growth and expansion of school feeding programs.—Not only are more children participating but more schools are taking advantage of the National School Lunch Act. Reports from all parts of the country indicate great effort is also being made to develop the educational aspects of the lunch program.

Legislation.—A course in nutrition is already a requirement for certification of elementary school teachers in a few States. Certification requirements for school lunch personnel is also a reality in some States. If every State passed similar legislation in the near future, who would teach these courses?

What Nutrition Workers Shall We Need?

If we hope to provide positive, coordinated programs in nutrition education for all groups in the population we shall need increased numbers of teachers, extension workers, school lunch personnel, dietitians, public health nutritionists, scientist-educators for our advanced schools, and research scientists. In addition we shall need nutrition educators to teach the courses in colleges of teacher education, and nutrition education consultants to interpret nutrition facts and to coordinate activities. Many of these workers will need at least a master's degree.

Where Can We Recruit People for Positions Requiring Advanced Degrees?

We can find these people among home economists holding bachelor's degrees if they are willing to take undergraduate courses in the basic sciences, particularly chemistry. We can also recruit nutritionists from the group who majored in dietetics and management if they are willing to take undergraduate courses in education—particularly methods of teaching all age groups. Persons holding bachelor's degrees in chemistry may also become nutritionists if they are willing to take undergraduate courses in foods and nutrition. Many of these graduates, although interested in nutrition education, are not willing to take the necessary undergraduate courses and thus are lost as potential staff.

We can hardly encourage the initiation of comprehensive nutrition education programs—however badly needed—if we have no sound plan for providing qualified personnel.

IN CONCLUSION

Nutrition education programs appear to be increasing in number and expanding in scope. The school lunch program with an educational dimension is becoming more widely used and is beginning to take its place in school curriculums. School lunch, however, should not be confused with a total nutrition education program. Efforts should be made to have other school personnel and community nutritionists prepared to develop and conduct comprehensive programs in schools using school lunch activities to best advantage.

This move toward greater emphasis on nutrition education programs of all descriptions indicates a need for nutrition educators prepared to work effectively in programs in schools, communities, and through the mass media of communication. Thus we see career opportunities in the foods and nutrition profession increasing.

Some colleges have already modified curriculums to meet the need for workers specifically prepared to conduct school lunch programs. Further modifications may be indicated to prepare nutritionists for other kinds of programs. Along with curriculum changes, we must have some plan for encouraging promising students to enter the profession if these programs are to be successful.

Nutrition committees might help solve this problem by conducting a community recruitment project or by contributing to career counseling in the junior and senior high schools. This would at least inform young people of the career opportunities available at a time when they are making career decisions.